

# HOOKEDNOW

DAVE SKIP RICK  
HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

Welcome to the April-May issue of *HookedNow*. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments at: [sweltsa@frontier.com](mailto:sweltsa@frontier.com) (include "HookedNow" in the subject line for quicker replies). Please tell your fishing buddies about *HookedNow*.

April and May kick the fishing season into high gear. Mayfly, stonefly, and caddisfly hatches can all be plentiful. The problem now is not, is there a hatch, but what hatch are the fish actually taking? One approach this time of year doesn't involve new equipment or new fly patterns, but rather the opposite: lay your rod down and observe the water and fish. Careful observation of what insects are active and what the trout are eating, can lead to more success than all your new leaders, knots, and flies combined.

In this issue we focus our attention on one widespread mayfly hatch - the Pale Morning Dun and related species. The Pale Morning Dun is a dominant western mayfly of the species *Ephemerella excrucians*. But several closely related species produce equally important hatches in the Midwest and East. All belong to the genus *Ephemerella* and have similar behavior and can be matched with similar patterns and techniques. Read on.

Contents this issue:

Skip Morris - *Dry Flies, Emergers, and the Mainstay Mayfly*  
Dave Hughes - *The Portability of PMD Patterns*  
Rick Hafele - *My Life as a Mayfly*



Photo by Rick Hafele



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# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## SKIP MORRIS - DRY FLIES, EMERGERS, & THE MAINSTAY MAYFLY



Photo by Carol Morris

Whenever little sunshine-colored mayflies appear, standing high on the current, wings erect, I smile at my good fortune. In the West, only one mayfly is both yellow and small--the Pale Morning Dun or PMD--and it really represents the critical line of support for all western river mayfly fishing during the long regular season--I've seen PMDs hatch as early as May and as late as mid-October. If our steady, reliable hatches of PMDs went away, the intervals between sessions of mayfly fishing on most rivers would be, well...disheartening. We'd realize just how good we had it.

I've found Pale Morning Duns hatching thick on spring creeks, tail-waters, and freestone rivers--basically, every kind of trout stream. Expect to run into them often from the Rockies west. However, PMDs need moving water, so you won't find them on lakes.

I fish nymphs often, but not often for PMDs. Sure, long ago I spent a few summers drifting size-18 Troth Pheasant Tail nymphs, and later Skip Nymph, Darks, through Oregon's Metolius River knowing full well the rainbows took them to be nymphs of the Pale Morning Dun. And I've done the same in other rivers well stocked with PMD nymphs. But on the whole, I've fished PMD dries and emergers 10 or 15 times for every time I've fished a PMD nymph.

Photo by Carol Morris



*PMD water can be slow, moderate, or even pretty quick - one reason the PMD is so widespread.*

I've indulged my PMD dry-fly and emerger habit on a whole lot of rivers in Washington, Montana, Colorado and a few other states. I love dropping a Morris Emerger, PMD among those elegant drifting mayflies and the trout working them.

Along the way I discovered that although there's a quality of sunshine in the yellowy wings and bodies of PMD duns, that's about the sunshine limit for these little buggers--they're no fans of clear skies. Yes, they'll show under a naked sun, but then

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

their hatching tends to be brief. Give them overcast skies, however, and they'll come off for hours. I remember fondly an Idaho cutthroat river running heavy under steady rain. The PMDs started every morning and paraded through raindrops and the noses of trout into late-afternoon. After three great fishing days the rain stopped. The remaining two days of the trip were tough fishing to overfed trout with too few mayflies coming off to matter. A few years later on a day of little storms swept through in succession by strong winds, I watched PMDs on a small Montana tail-water hatch to the delight of brown trout whenever clouds cut off the sun, then halt their hatching altogether when the sun would reappear. It went back and forth like that all afternoon. Each storm was worth waiting for.

Photo by Carol Morris



*PMDs hatching on flat water often present the fly fisher a serious challenge.*

According to my fellow HookedNow writer Dave Hughes, in his new book, *Pocketguide to Western Hatches*, PMD "duns emerge in the surface film or just beneath it." Dave knows far more about entomology than I; I'll take his word. Besides, that fits with my experience. Duns that hatch in the film call for a standard emerger. My own first choice is my Morris Emerger PMD--it's proven itself on difficult rainbows and browns on Colorado's South Platte River and equally tough browns on Montana's Big Hole, not to mention all those other rivers and trout all over the West. It floats with unusually long and stubbornly for a half-sunken emerger-fly too. But many fly fishers fish Compara-duns and Quigley Cripples during PMD hatches with no complaints.

The process of fishing an emerger or dry fly during a PMD hatch is straightforward: drop the fly upstream of a rising trout with enough slack in line, leader, and tippet so that the fly drifts freely and naturally. Easier said than done sometimes, of course. Because PMDs live in and hatch from water sometimes lazy slow (though they also like currents up to medium-quick), some trout can get plenty of time to inspect your imitation for size, shape, color, and behavior. Therefore your slack-line casting must good, to provide a convincing drift of the fly. Accurate too, since PMDs often hatch in



considerable abundance which allows a trout to confine its feeding within a small area and just take in the feast.

The ever more popular, nearly universal solution to tough rising trout is the downstream presentation. It's a great way to get an excellent drift of the fly without spooking the fish with your fly line. Sometimes it's the only solution.

The subsurface emergence of some PMDs presents a facet of mayfly fishing that seems largely ignored. The logical approach would be a wet fly, dead drift, perhaps as a dropper off a dry fly that serves as an indicator. It's easy to imagine a trout snubbing dry flies and half-sunken emerger flies while moving to another helpless mayfly struggling toward the surface, hampered by broad wings. I've looked into a clear river during a PMD hatch to see the gleam of tiny wings below the surface. I used to wonder what that was about. No longer.

Trout focused on underwater-hatching PMDs seems a worthy subject for study and experimentation. I'm not there yet, but it's on my list.

The spinner stage deserves exploration too, and God knows I've tried, but Fate doesn't seem to like the idea. I know there are good PMD spinner falls, and I have caught evening-rise trout on PMD spinner flies. But I've never really hit it right. Two years ago on a lazy Montana tail-water river I was ready. Everything seemed perfect: PMDs hatching all day and, according to local knowledge, they'd been doing so for a few weeks; every hank of water-weed crawling with PMD nymphs; an ideal slick where I knew the browns loved to rise. I was prepared with the right fly and the rest. And I caught some good fish, on a PMD spinner fly in fact, but the real spinners really never showed. A nasty storm drifted through with lightening and a downpour and that seemed to put the spinners off. It didn't put off the trout though, nor me either. But even after the storm passed and things settled, the spinners wouldn't come and the trout had to settle for the scattering mix of insects that did. Later that week, same thing: good hatch all day, waiting at the slick, thunderstorm. See what I mean? Fate.

I *will* attend a real big-time PMD spinner fall. Persistence will pay off. Someday. Once it finally happens, it'll probably happen all the time. I've seen things go that way before...

*Photo by Carol Morris*



*Presentation is always important, but never more so than during a heavy hatch of PMDs. A good drift and the right fly are needed for success.*



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

I have to tell you about my favorite PMD fishing--it's when PMDs work in harmony with green drakes. Spring through early summer is when I usually catch this mayfly tag-team event. When I do catch it, I generally keep going back to it. I've seen it in Montana. I've seen it in Idaho. Even a little in Oregon.

*Photo by Carol Morris*

The best is when PMDs come off all day under clouds, and when their hatching tapers off, that's when the drakes start to show. The drakes are no better than the PMDs--the trout keep feeding in about the same way, and I haven't noticed particularly larger fish coming up. But switching from one mayfly to another is a pleasing change. Bigger flies that are easier to see in the fading light, the haunting cool and calm of evening... When I find PMDs working with green drakes I keep coming back as long as everything holds together. There may be other fine streams with other fish and other hatches nearby, but I'm not about to miss a PMD-and-green-drake-day for anything.

Still, a day of just PMDs all by themselves is something I won't miss either.



[CLICK HERE](#) to watch a video of Skip discussing his favorite PMD Patterns.

[CLICK HERE](#) to watch a video of Skip showing how PMD patterns float on the water's surface.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## PATTERNS FOR PMDs (all flies tied by Skip Morris)

Photos by Skip Morris



### TROTH PHEASANT TAIL Al Troth

**HOOK:** Heavy wire, standard length to 1X long, sizes 18 to 14 (for PMDs).

**THREAD:** Brown 8/0 or 6/0.

**TAIL:** Pheasant-tail fibers.

**RIB:** Small copper wire.

**ABDOMEN:** Pheasant-tail fibers.

**WINGCASE and LEGS:** Pheasant-tail fibers, one bunch of tips create both wing case and legs.

**THORAX:** Peacock herl.

**COMMENTS:** Every seasoned fly fisher knows the Pheasant Tail (in this case, the *Troth* Pheasant Tail. The other Pheasant Tail came from Englishman Frank Sawyer)--it's a real standard. I've always thought of the pattern as a PMD imitation.



### MORRIS EMERGER, PMD Skip Morris

**HOOK:** Light wire, humped shank (pupa/emergent hook), sizes 18 to 14.

**THREAD:** Yellow 8/0.

**TAIL:** Brown mottled hen-back.

**RIB:** Fine gold wire.

**ABDOMEN:** Pheasant-tail fibers.

**THORAX:** Soft-yellow buoyant synthetic dubbing (Superfine Dry Fly, poly...).

**WING and BURST SHUCK:** Bleached or natural-light elk hair. Make a fan of the tips, angling forward slightly, and trim the butts straight across over the rear of the thorax.

**COMMENTS:** My standby emerger pattern, with alterations mainly in size and colors, for nearly all mayfly hatches.



### COMPARA-DUN, PMD

**HOOK:** Light wire, Standard length or 1X long, sizes 18 to 14.

**THREAD:** Olive 8/0.

**WING:** natural-light or bleached coastal deer hair, the tips forming a fan.

**TAIL:** Blue-dun hackle fibers, split.

**BODY:** Buoyant olive-yellow synthetic dubbing (Superfine Dry Fly, poly...).

**COMMENTS:** It works. Compara-duns do that.



### LIGHT CAHILL

**HOOK:** Light wire, standard length or 1X long, sizes 18 to 14 (for PMDs).

**THREAD:** Tan or cream 8/0.

**TAIL:** Ginger hackle fibers.

**BODY:** Buoyant cream synthetic dubbing (Superfine Dry Fly, poly...).

**WINGS:** Lemon wood-duck fibers, upright and divided.

**HACKLE:** Ginger.

**COMMENTS:** A solid choice for the traditionalist--I used the Light Cahill for years during hatches of PMDs.

**NOTE:** Skip's book *Fly Tying Made Clear and Simple* teaches the tying of the Troth Pheasant Tail nymph and the Compara-dun. His book *Trout Flies for Rivers, Patterns From the West That Work Everywhere*, will teach you to tie his Morris Emerger, PMD through both written instructions and photos and video.



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## DAVE HUGHES – THE PORTABILITY OF PMD PATTERNS



Photo by Rick Hafele

Naturally I've fished heavy PMD hatches in the same places you have: on the Deschutes, McKenzie, Henry's Fork of the Snake, Big Hole, Bighorn, and lots of other less famous western waters. It takes a pretty simple set of patterns to match them; you could use Rick's, or Skip's, or as I do, a set winnowed from theirs and many other knowledgeable tiers, as I've listed them in my recent book, *Pocketguide to Western Hatches*.

For the nymph, I use either Rick's Deschutes PMD, or the more universal Beadhead Fox Squirrel, originated by the great Dave Whitlock. Both of these patterns are excellent when PMD nymphs are active. But they're also effective as searching nymphs, when no PMDs are moving around, or you have no idea what nymphs trout might be seeing most. There are probably a couple of good reasons these flies catch so many trout when trout are not working PMD nymphs. First, lots of those nymphs are out there, in most western waters, and trout are always seeing at least a few of them. They have no hesitation to take a nymph that looks at least a little like them. Second, the flies are small, size 16, and it's a given that trout are always on the lookout for nymphs in that size range.

Photos by Dave Hughes



Beadhead Fox Squirrel (left) and Rick's Deschutes PMD nymph (right).



PMD nymph.

If you've never tried a two-nymph combination, with the larger of the two a size 10 or 12, and the smaller a size 16 or 18, then you've never noticed that trout with few exceptions are caught most often on the smaller nymph. If there is a single thing that will improve your nymph fishing--alongside adding another split shot to get deeper--it's to

reduce the size flies you use, with at least one being a size 16 or smaller unless trout are selective to something larger, for example during the salmon fly migration.

As a consequence of these factors--abundance of naturals and size of the imitations--nymphs tied for PMDs have a greatly enlarged usefulness to you. It's no secret that the Beadhead Fox Squirrel, in size 16, is my favorite searching nymph, the one I tie on first in any situation where I don't know what might work better, or tie on second, as the point fly in almost any standard two-nymph rig. In other words, unless I know something else will work better, I've almost always got a PMD nymph as part of any searching rig.

One of my flies for the duns makes an attempt to imitate the emerger stage at the same time as it does the dun. It's Craig Mathews's PMD Sparkle Dun, and it's my go-to fly during any PMD hatch. The trailing shuck is amber, and represents the cast cuticle of the natural nymph still attached to the dun. PMDs have a high rate of failure; trout often focus on emergers and cripples, and it's handy to have something to imitate them. I like the Sparkle Dun because it's essentially the old famous Compara-dun tied with the shuck instead of split hackle-fiber tails. If trout happen to be feeding on cripples, it works. If they happen instead to be feeding on perfect duns, they still seem happy to get a chance to whack a Sparkle Dun...I should say sip, because the naturals, when stuck to their shuck, are pinned in the surface; trout rarely take them with bold moves.



Photos by Dave Hughes

*PMD Sparkle Dun (left) and PMD Thorax Dun (right).*



*PMD dun.*

The Sparkle Dun is tied for smooth water, which is where PMDs hatch most often. But it doesn't always work, especially if the hatch is on wrinkled water, so I carry a second dressing, Mike Lawson and Vince Marinaro's PMD Thorax Dun. This answers in two situations. First, trout sometimes simply get it in their heads that one pattern isn't acceptable to them, and in that case, you'd better have a second dressing to offer them. Second, in those cases where the water is a bit riffled, then the Sparkle Dun might not



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

have sufficient floatation, and you need a pattern with hackle, hence the Thorax. I'll confess I do not do well with traditional Catskill dry fly ties for the PMDs; they would work well over trout feeding on the naturals in rough water, but it's rare that PMDs emerge in water that is any more than slightly bouncy. So I prefer the Thorax Dun, with its hackle trimmed in a V-shape on the bottom, rather than the fully-hackled Catskill tie.



PMD Spinner (photo by Dave Hughes)

I haven't gotten into PMD spinner falls very often. I don't know if they hit the streams in late evening, after I've gotten scared of rattlesnakes and ghosts and headed in for shelter and dinner, or if they come back to the water more often in early morning, before I've got my own engine started. I suspect it's a combination of the two: late evening on cool spring days, and early morning on warm summer days. Either way, I haven't bumped into them often enough to tie any more than a couple of color variations of a single dressing, not surprisingly the Red and the Ginger Quill Spinners.



Now I'd like to depart a bit from standard PMD wisdom. I carry the duns and the spinner, just as I do the nymph dressings, wherever I might travel in the fly fishing world, and though I don't use them as searching patterns, as I do the nymphs, I'm often glad I've got them on me even if no PMDs are in the eyes and minds of any trout at the moment. I'm thinking first of a trip Masako and I took to Pennsylvania to gather photos for the recent second edition of *Reading Trout Water*; I didn't want all the pictures to be western. So we spent ten days fishing and photographing famous Pennsylvania streams, and had a great time doing it.

The last evening of our trip, we were on Pine Creek, staying at the beautiful Cedar Run Lodge, which is right out of Ernest Schwiebert's early writing. We stopped at a fly shop on Pine Creek before fishing, and bought



Pine Creek, in Pennsylvania, where Dave and his wife got into a sulphur hatch and solved it with PMD dressings.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

Photos by Dave Hughes



*When trout rose to eastern sulphurs on Pine Creek, in PA, Masako Tani did fine with western PMD patterns..*

a few flies for the sulphurs, which were then hatching. I peered closely at what I was offered as the best dressings; they were size 16, and were not distinguishable from PMD Compara-duns. I bought a few, just in case, then we hit the stream, the hatch started, and I tied on my normal size 16 PMD Sparkle Dun. There was one bit of wisdom the fly shop offered, something I'd not have considered: the lady clerk fished the sulphur hatch the evening before, and recommended giving the fly an occasional scoot across the surface during its drift. This was applied, and the trout seemed quite satisfied to take flies tied for the western hatch.

I've encountered hatches of pale yellowish-cream mayflies, in size 16 and 18, in many other states, and even countries, from North Carolina through the more familiar East, Mid-west, and West, all the way to New Zealand and even Japan. They're not the same species, or even genus, for which we tie our imitations. But trout, as has been said, don't speak Latin, don't key their insects to species before eating them, or accepting their imitations. As a consequence, PMD dun dressings can solve problems for you in a lot of places where trout have never had the pleasure of sipping a PMD natural.

Photo by Dave Hughes



*The pale evening dun above is slightly larger than PMD duns, but similar in shape and color.*

Even here in the west, PMD patterns can be applied outside their field of expertise, so to speak. I worked my way up the west bank of the Deschutes River, one mid-summer day, and



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

toward evening began honing my eye for the spotted sedges that normally get active over the water that time of year and that time of day. Instead, a hatch of pale evening duns--PEDs--began emerging sporadically on smooth water about ten to twenty feet from shore. As light waned the hatch got heavier, and not surprisingly, trout responded by lining up and sipping them.

I don't get into PED hatches often enough to habitually carry specific imitations, though I know what to tie if I encounter them. However, I was out on the river, in the midst of a hatch, and had neither time nor inclination to gallop to camp, tie up a few PED dun patterns, trot back and see if there were any trout left to cast them over...or any light left to cast them in. So I peered into my fly boxes, found my perpetual PMD imitations, and tied on the largest of them. It was a size 16. The smallest of the PEDs in the emergence were size 14. Those trout seemed unable to parse out one size from another, and I was able to enjoy fishing that was, perhaps, at least as good as I'd have had with specific PED imitations. Certainly I did better than I'd have done by running back to the tent trailer to tie some, or driven to the nearest shop to buy some.

*Photos by Dave Hughes*



*Pale evening duns are a common hatch in the late afternoon on many western rivers, including the Deschutes river in Oregon.*



*If you don't have pale evening dun imitations, try your PMD dressings; they'll work.*

So don't limit your thoughts about PMD imitations to PMD situations. Tie flies that will solve the hatch for you, then carry them with you wherever you fish for trout. It doesn't take a lot of these pale sulfur-colored dressings to solve situations in a lot of places in the world where trout swim.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## RICK HAFELE- MY LIFE AS A MAYFLY

A Pale Morning Dun Speaks: *(photos by Rick Hafele unless noted)*

It's cold on the bottom of a trout stream. Of course, as a cold-blooded mayfly nymph adapted to cold-water trout streams I find it rather comfortable. I'm sitting, along with a half dozen other nymphs, on the bottom of a gentle riffle among golf ball to baseball size stones lazily grazing on diatoms and bits of algae like we've done every day for almost a year now. I find it hard to keep track of time since every day is much like the one before, except that every day there seems to be a few less of us grazing. I've also noticed lately that most of my brothers and sisters

around me now have odd growths on their backs shaped like two dark brownish-black slippers. I can't see my own back, but it feels different and my skin seems to be getting tighter.

Suddenly a call goes out that an important meeting is scheduled and all the nymphs in my neighborhood must attend. Apparently the chief nymph has something critical to tell us. My buddies and I on the rock can hardly eat as this is the first time such a meeting has ever been called, and we have no idea what could be so important.

Hundreds, hell thousands, of nymphs start moving towards a hollowed out area surrounded by waving aquatic plants. The afternoon sun reflects off the water, and the sky looks like spilled paint in the water's mirror-like surface. Crawling along the bottom may look safe, but moving from the rock crevices to the meeting location is risky. If you loose your footing the current quickly takes you away, and we've been told from our first days as nymphs to stay out of the current at all costs - when you drift away you never come back.

Once gathered together around the aquatic plants we all settle into a comfortable resting place. Some hang on the leaves of the plants. Others sit in the sand at the base of the stems. I find a nice flat stone off to one side to crawl onto just as the chief nymph stands up on a piece of dead wood lodged in the bottom and begins explaining what is happening.



Photo by Rick Kruger/Marc Williamson





# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

"Dear brothers and sisters this is the day you've all been eating for," he begins. "Within the next few days you will change in ways you can't imagine. You've all seen the dark slipper-like growths on everyone's back. And you've felt the tightness of your skin. In the past such feelings meant you needed to find a safe place to hide while your tight outer skin fell off and a new looser skin took its place. That was then, this is now."

The head nymph pauses waiting to make sure we are all paying close attention, then goes on, "The next time you feel the gentle warming of the water, when the late morning sun slowly raises the water temperature, you will have an uncontrollable urge to let go of the bottom and swim towards the surface."

"Yah, right," I say to the nymph on my left. "That's the last thing I'm going to do. See those fish just above eyeing us? It would be suicide to leave the stream bottom."

The head nymph keeps talking, "You will try to resist, but resistance is futile and only prolongs the inevitable. It is the destiny of every nymph here and across the entire waterway to let go of the bottom and swim for the heavens above."

He now stands straight up on his two back legs using his tails for balance, "I repeat, every nymph here and across the entire waterway will let go of the stream bottom and head for the surface. Many of you won't make it. Some will be eaten just as you leave the cover of the bottom. Others will get swept up in swift currents and carried downstream to waiting trout. Many of you, however, will make it, and for those the most amazing thing will happen," he yells at the top of his gills. "Just before you reach the surface you will slip out of your tight skins, and instead of a new nymph skin underneath, you will find you have two pair of wings unfolding from your backs. You will also notice that you are as mute as a clam, as you now have no mouth with which to talk, eat, or even drink a drop of water."

"Whoa, this is getting a little far out," I say as I look over at my buddy on the rock next to me. He looks back and quickly adds, "Why in the world would we all do something so dumb? I'm not going."

The old nymph continues, "Why would you do such a dangerous thing? Well, you may have heard stories that someday you will be able to fly through the air like birds. Of course you didn't believe these fairytales, but I'm here to tell you now they are true. If you get to the surface and poke your body through the tough film, you will take off into the air like snowflakes rising up to the clouds." The old nymph's gills twitch up and down,



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE



"Then fly quickly to the nearest tree to hide and wait, for within another 24 hours you will molt your skin one last time."

His large eyes sparkle now as he prepares to finish his speech, "Once you've lost your last skin you will take to the air one more time for a great orgy in the sky. Wild sex for all, after which the ladies will lay their burden of eggs back onto the water's surface. Then all will sleep."

With that the old nymph drops down onto all six legs, walks slowly down the log, and disappears.

"That's the craziest thing I've ever heard," my buddy says, while flicking his tails up and down.

But just then he lets go of the stone he's on, and with a shocked look on his face he begins swimming up. When I look around dozens more, then hundreds more, then thousands more nymphs start swimming up. That's when I feel my own legs let go of the smooth round stone on the bottom and I'm floating downstream in the current.

"Holy crap!" I yell as a nymph next to me disappears into a trout's mouth.

Other trout are swimming by with mouths open, darting left and right. Nymphs are disappearing left and right as well. I decide it is swim or get eaten, so swim I do. I swim like there's no tomorrow, and then suddenly my skin begins to split open. I'm still a foot or so below the surface.

"Just like the old nymph predicted," I yell, when suddenly I'm unable to speak.



*Photo by Rick Hafele*



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

Short crumpled wings poke out of my back, and I notice my body is no longer brown, but a beautiful pale yellow color. It is either by luck or grace that I make it to the surface, then through the surface. Others are there too, but not for long. It's crazy. From above swallows dart down grabbing my kin off the water. From below trout keep coming up sucking my buddies back down. I flail my new wings until they feel stiff, then cross my tarsi hoping beyond hope to escape the attacks from above and below. I flap hard, and suddenly, like magic, I feel freedom. I'm flying.



Once in the air swallows keep coming. One barely misses me but gets a similar looking brother right beside me. As I head for the nearest tree I see a strange creature in the water waving a long slender stem in air. He seems to have one of my kind attached to a thread and is throwing it on the water. It doesn't look much like me I think, but a trout sucks it down and he lets out a yell like some wild creature. I'm not going to complain if there is one less trout eating my buddies.

I land on a leaf and sit perfectly still. I'm so unnerved I don't move a muscle the rest of that day or all that night. Late the next morning I once again have the strangest feeling when suddenly my my skin splits open, and within just a minute or two my pale yellow wings are clear as glass and I feel lighter and quite excited.

The late morning air is mild and calm and I can see that many others of my kind also look different than yesterday and have already started to fly off their leaves back into the sky. I think, "Well, no sense in stopping now, let's go for it," and fly off with the others.

We now fill the sky twenty or thirty feet above the water. A swarm of millions,



nearly all males, we dance up and down in the sunlight. The swallows are back too, but to be honest I don't care. I feel light as goose down as I flap my paper thin clear wings and dance up and down several feet through the air. Thousands, maybe millions of us, dance in unison. While flitting up and down I strain all thousand facets of my huge red eyes to find a pale rusty brown female any where in my vicinity. There she is. A few feet above and just ahead of me. I gave it all I have and fly in from behind and wrap my long front

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

legs around her thorax. She knows just what to do and in seconds we are dropping slowly towards the water while we hold each other in our one and only embrace.

Just before hitting the water she lets go and flies away. I never see her again. I start twirling in the breeze. I can see a swallow change directions and head my way. Then I see the swallow's mouth open.....



## More About Pale Morning Duns:

Besides having a rather hazardous life with little time to mate and lay eggs, PMDs have a variety of traits that can frustrate fly fishers to no end. For example -

1. Who are these guys? PMDs belong to a family of mayflies called Ephemeroidea. This family includes some of the most important mayfly hatches found in North America. In the West, besides PMDs, this family also includes green drakes (*Drunella grandis* and *D. doddsi*) and Flavs (*Drunella flavilinea* and *D. coloradensis*). In the East, hatches in this family include the Hendrickson (*Ephemerella subvaria*), pale evening dun (*Ephemerella rotunda* and *E. invaria*), and sulphur (*Ephemerella dorothea*). The western PMD belongs to a single species, *Ephemerella excrucians*. If you pay attention to Latin names however, you may remember that PMDs were once considered two species, *E. inermis* and *E. infrequens*. No longer. Trout don't seem to care what Latin name we call them, which is probably a very good thing since Latin names have a tendency to keep changing.
2. PMDs live in wide range of streams and habitats. For example, you are just as likely to run into a great hatch of PMDs on Silver Creek, a classic spring creek in Idaho, as you are on the Green River, a large tailwater stream in Utah, as you are on a small freestone stream like Rock Creek in Montana. And within each of these stream systems PMD nymphs will be at home in moderate to slow currents where rich beds of aquatic plants grow, and in moderate to fast riffles with small gravel to cobble substrates. Such adaptability means you will find PMDs in most every Western trout stream you fish. A



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

similar level of adaptability occurs within the Eastern/Midwest species of *Ephemerella*, making them equally important in those regions of the country.



*Many types of streams and waters hold good populations of PMDs*

3. The emergence behavior of PMDs can be rather confusing and not altogether consistent. Sometimes the nymphs swim all the way up to the surface before the duns wiggle their way out of the nymph's tight exoskeleton. But more often than not the duns escape their nymph's exoskeleton a foot or more below the water's surface so that the dun, with crumpled wings unfolding, rises the rest of the way up and must pierce through the surface film to the surface. This behavior can be critical to recognize if trout are feeding on rising duns below the surface - a common practice I might add. When this occurs, a wet fly fished six inches or more below the surface imitating the submerged duns, will generally out fish dry flies on the surface or little nymph patterns fished just below it.



*Many PMDs hit the surface looking something like this. Because wings still have to straighten and dry, duns float a long time before flying off the water. A fact trout don't ignore.*

4. Cripples are very common. Perhaps due to their emergence behavior, or for some other reason unknown, many of the duns on the surface end up as cripples, meaning instead of sitting upright on the water with nice straight erect wings, they lay on their sides with wings dangling in different directions. Dry flies that imitate the nicely formed duns, like a well tied compara dun, can produce well, but often a crumpled twisted looking pattern that imitates the cripples will produce better. A simple pattern for this is

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

a yellow soft hackle fly fished flush in the surface film rather than below it. Present it drag free to rising trout that have refused your nice neat looking dry fly and see what happens.



Examples of typical PMD cripples - these duns that didn't quite make it!

5. Color! If there is one thing about PMDs that can send fly tiers, and fly fishers, to the psych ward it's the range of colors they come in. This is true for both nymphs and duns. The nymphs shown below were collected off the same rock at the same time. They are all the same species, *Ephemerella excrucians*. So, which color should you use to imitate them? I don't know, and to be honest I don't think it matters. The common pheasant tail nymph's color seems to fit in the range shown here quite well, and I would say it's as good a choice as any. The same color schizophrenia occurs with duns. Once again it leaves me wondering just how important color really is in my fly pattern. This kind of color variation occurs in many other species, not just PMDs, and not just in mayflies. This is also why I find it hard to answer fly tiers when they ask me what color dubbing I use for a particular pattern. They want a very specific answer, like "yellow hair-tron dubbing color number 33." When I say, "Well, something pale yellow to light brown is fine," they don't feel very satisfied with my answer. But nature just doesn't fit into neat categories like pale yellow #33.







*Two PMD duns showing common differences in color (male above and female left). These were collected from different streams, but such color variation is common among duns on the same stream as well.*

6. Spinners? As both Dave and Skip discuss in their articles, PMD spinner falls can be a hit and miss affair, with misses more common than hits. The problem from my experience is that their spinner falls are basically unpredictable. Most of the time you can expect them to occur mid to late morning or into the early afternoon. But this will vary with weather conditions. Hotter weather will push it earlier in the day and cooler weather later in the day. And some days they just don't seem to show up. When they do show up however, it is wise to be prepared with a simple rusty spinner pattern, usually in a size 16. When a good spinner fall occurs trout will take up feeding lanes where they can leisurely sip in these dead little morsels of food. If you get everything right your fly will be included with their lunch. Eastern hatches of related species, such as the Hendrickson, have more predictable and reliable spinner falls with most occurring in the evening.
7. Fairly long period of emergence. Another nice thing about PMDs, in the West at least, is that the hatch often continues for weeks and weeks on any given stream. In areas with mild climate, like parts of California and the Pacific Northwest, PMD hatches start around mid to late May and continue into early or mid July. In Rocky Mountain states the hatch typically begins in late June and can continue into August or even September. The Eastern relatives of PMDs tend to be spring hatches starting with the Hendrickson from mid April to end of May, followed by pale evening duns in May and June, and last the sulphurs in June and July. Unlike blue-winged olives or *Baetis*, PMDs do not have multiple generations per year, so when the hatch is over on a given stream you won't see them again until the following year.

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

8. Be ready! If you know you will be on trout stream during PMD season, make sure you have a selection of patterns that cover the nymph, emerger, dun, cripple, and spinner. A key to success during a good hatch is observation. Trout get quite selective to one stage or another during a good hatch, and unless you take the time to see what stage they are actually eating you can waste a lot of casts with the wrong fly. Sit down, watch the fish closely, then put on a fly that fits the stage they are taking. Size is perhaps the most critical part of matching this hatch, so it also helps to collect a few duns, cripples, spinners, etc. to check that your flies aren't too big. Rarely do we tie on flies that are too small! Below are my go to patterns for PMDs and their relatives. Adjust size and color as needed.



## **BEADHEAD PMD NYMPH**

**HOOK:** Tiemco 2457 or similar, sizes 18 to 14.

**THREAD:** Olive 8/0.

**TAIL:** 4-6 brown hackle fibers

**RIB:** Copper wire.

**BODY:** Medium brown to reddish brown dubbing.

**THORAX:** Pine squirrel dubbing with guard hairs.

**WINGCASE**(optional): Dark turkey tail.



## **HAIR WING PMD DUN**

**HOOK:** Dry fly hook, sizes 18 to 14.

**THREAD:** Olive 8/0.

**TAIL:** 4-6 brown hackle fibers

**RIB:** Light brown 6/0 thread.

**BODY:** Pale yellow dubbing.

**HACKLE:** Light brown hackle trimmed flat on bottom.

**WING:** Bleached deer body hair.



## **YELLOW SOFT HACKLE**

**HOOK:** Dry fly hook, sizes 18 to 14.

**THREAD:** Olive 8/0.

**TAIL:** 4-6 brown hackle fibers

**RIB:** Fine copper wire.

**BODY:** Light yellow dubbing.

**THORAX:** Pink dubbing.

**WING:** Quail body feather or other gray soft hackle.



## **RUSTY SPINNER**

**HOOK:** Dry fly hook, sizes 18 to 14.

**THREAD:** Olive 8/0.

**TAIL:** 4-6 brown hackle fibers widely divided

**BODY:** Reddish brown dubbing.

**THORAX:** Light brown dubbing.

**WING:** White poly.

[CLICK HERE](#) for video on PMD nymph behavior.



## Say What?

We received the following question for this issue. Here's our best shot at the answer!  
Thanks and keep the questions coming.

### Question:

Skip, was the fly you tied using wool a Caddis? If so could I tie a standard caddis and use wool instead of elk hair? Will it float as well?

Les, Seattle, Washington

### ANSWER:

Hi, Les,

Good question, but since you're allowing me to publish your question and my answer in HookedNow, I'd better let the HookedNow readers in on the background.

Last weekend of February fellow HookedNow author Rick Hafele and I conducted a two-day workshop (Mastering Western Rivers and Lakes) just outside of Seattle, and at the end of each day I demonstrated the tying of some of my favorite flies. Les is referring to my Woolly Wing dry fly.



*The Woolly Wing by Skip Morris. Floats great and is highly visible on the water.*

Okay, Les, the first thing I need to tell you is that wool floats high and long. And that seems to be all wool. For my Woolly Wing, an imitation of both caddis adults and to a lesser degree stoneflies (they both look very similar from below, from the trouts' view--a stout body, six legs, a wing outlining the body), I use what is commonly called "sculpin wool." I try to get the wool that's coarse and straight, not wavy, and most of it is straight. You can make the wavy stuff

# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

work, but it never looks as good as the straight.

Wool gets a little wild if it's long, and the Woolly Wing tames it by using it in short sections, three or four sections to make the wing. But wool blends with itself so that when trimmed, it makes a full wing with a clean outline--and a buoyant wing.

So I can't tell you how wool would work in your favorite caddis dry flies, but if you want to tie the Woolly Wing (it's not yet tied commercially, not yet...) take a look at *Fly Tying Made Clear and Simple II, Advanced Techniques*; it contains detailed instructions on how to tie the Woolly Wing. You can find all the standard variations (I tie it in a broad range of colors and sizes) in *Trout Flies for Rivers, Patterns From the West that Work Everywhere*.

Hope that helps. And thanks for both the question and for coming to the workshop. Rick and I hope to put on a couple of such workshops a year, in various western cities. Best, Skip Morris

**Readers, if you have a question for Skip, Dave, or Rick just email it to:**

**[sweltsa@frontier.com](mailto:sweltsa@frontier.com)**

**Please include "HookedNow Question" in the subject line.**



# HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

## News from Dave, Rick, & Skip!

### MORE WORKSHOPS COMING UP!

Rick has the following workshops coming soon!

#### May 4 & 5: Deschutes River workshops in Maupin, Oregon.

These workshops cover how to recognize and match critical western hatches, plus on-stream instruction for fishing nymphs, emergers, and dries.

Sponsored by the Deschutes Canyon Fly Shop

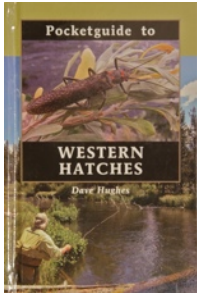
To register call: 541-395-2565 or <http://www.flyfishingdeschutes.com/event-calendar>

#### June 20-22: 3-day Fly Fishing School on the Deschutes River.

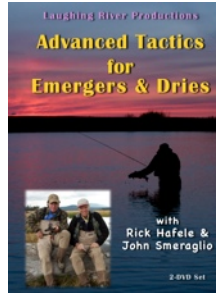
This special 3-day school is limited to 6 students. Folks will be taken by jet boat to a private camp on the lower Deschutes River. Everything will be provided for.

Instruction will include slide shows, on-stream instruction for nymphs, emergers, and dries, plus plenty of time to fish for wild native rainbows on the famous Deschutes River! Sponsored by the Fly Fishing Shop, Welches, Oregon.

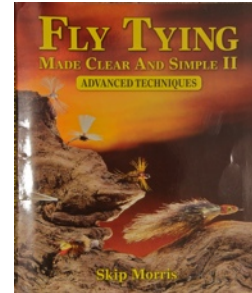
To register call: 1(800) 266-3971 or <http://www.flyfishusa.com/adventure-trips/PhD/fly-fishing-school-hafele.htm>



Dave's newest book, *Pocketguide to Western Hatches*, just out September 2011, is now available.--\$21.95--Stackpole Books, 2011



Rick's newest instructional DVD (2-disc set) with John Smeraglio titled, *Advanced Tactics for Emergers & Dries*, is now available. Order it online at [www.laughingrivers.com](http://www.laughingrivers.com) or get at your local fly shop. \$29.95 - Laughing River Productions, 2011



Skip's latest book, *Fly Tying Made Clear and Simple II, Advanced Techniques*, offers thorough instructions for tying many great patterns for fussy trout. Frank Amato Pub, 2009

To learn more about Dave, Skip, and Rick's latest publications, where they are speaking, or to book them for your own program, go to their personal websites at:

Skip Morris: <http://www.skip-morris-fly-tying.com/>  
Rick Hafele: <http://www.rickhafele.com/RH/Home.html>  
Dave Hughes: <http://dave-hughes-fly-fishing.com/>